



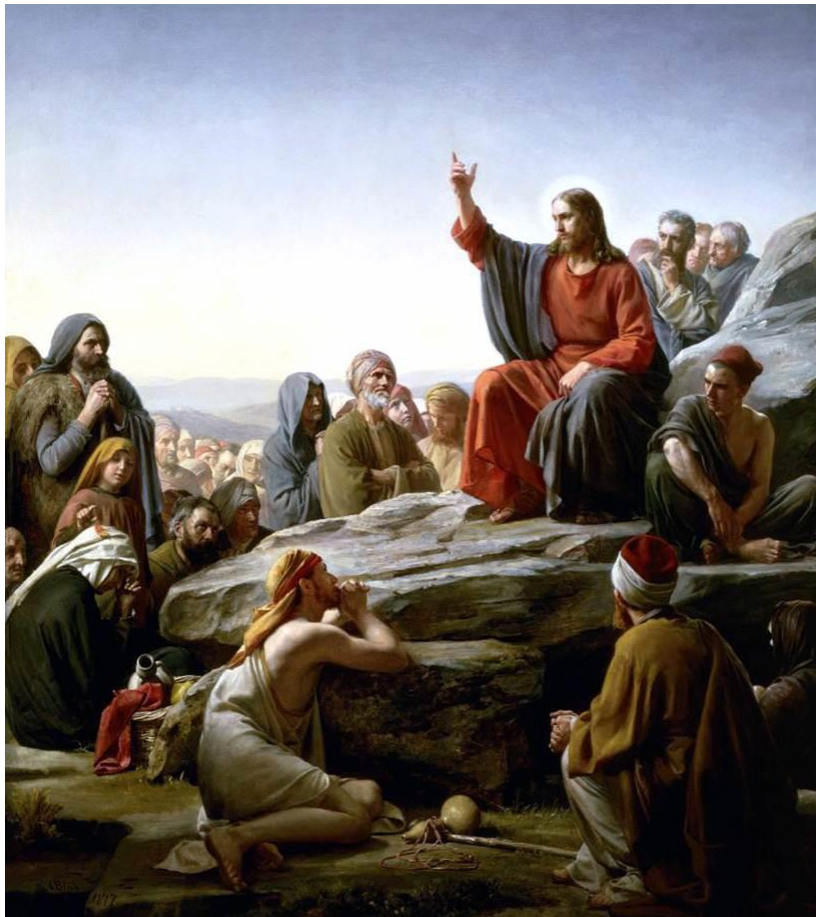
Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time A



Sermon on the Mount, Carl Heinrich Bloch, Danish painter, d. 1890



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Dear Jesus,

Help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go.

Flood my soul with your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of you.

Shine through me,

And be so in me that every soul I come into contact with
may feel your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus!

John Henry Cardinal Newman

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

The Gospels for last Sunday and this Sunday are preludes to the Sermon on the Mount that we will hear the next three Sundays.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

First reading: Sirach 15: 15-20

- ▶ Today's reading from Sirach is a catechism on free will. Nowhere in sacred Scripture is there a more definitive treatment of free will than in today's pericope.
- ▶ Free will goes hand in hand with human nature; it was proffered at the creation of the world.
- ▶ Human beings can either make the choice for good or they can choose evil.
- ▶ The Hebrew understanding can be summed up in the word inclination. Human beings are inclined toward good or evil.
- ▶ Faith is required to honestly keep the commandments of God.
- ▶ Faith means that a person is not only a hearer of God's word, but a "doer" of God's word as well.
- ▶ Sirach challenges believers into action.
- ▶ When one chooses good, he or she chooses life. When one chooses evil, he or she chooses death.
- ▶ When people follow the Law of God they choose life; when they do not they choose death. It is that simple for Sirach. It should be that simple for us.
- ▶ God does not cause a person to sin. God calls every person to righteousness.
- ▶ We are responsible for our own sinfulness.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What is the lesson in this reading? How could this possibly be a word for us today?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that we are not only to be a hearer of the Word but

also a doer of the Word?

- ▶ When have you been a doer of God's word?
- ▶ Can you describe an example from your life in which a bad choice was anything but life-giving?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 2: 6-10

- ▶ Paul presents his catechism on what is meant by wisdom.
- ▶ He contrasts it with the gnostic understanding of wisdom.
- ▶ The gnostic members of the Corinthian community thought they possessed a special wisdom that others did not possess. They were somehow more spiritually mature than others in the community.
- ▶ Paul insisted that wisdom is not to be found in some special, private revelation to a select few. Wisdom is to be found in contemplating and embracing the mystery of Jesus Christ crucified.
- ▶ Wisdom is found in the suffering, death and final exaltation of Christ himself.
- ▶ The gnostics in the community insisted that the cross was of the past and not their concern. They insisted that as a result of the resurrection they were given a special knowledge and wisdom of things divine.
- ▶ They were set apart from others; they enjoyed a special status as a result of their superior wisdom.
- ▶ The paradox inherent in the Corinthian situation lies in the fact that their refusal to see the power of the cross illustrated how spiritually immature they truly were.
- ▶ Paul seemed to allude to the possibility that those who put Jesus to death were influenced by an unseen evil power. As such they did not realize the import or implications of their actions. They were blind.
- ▶ This makes it all the more ironic that the gnostic members of the Corinthian community were blind to the cross. As such they were aligning themselves with those who put Jesus to death.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group.

- ▶ In what way are the same concerns Paul expressed evident in the Christian community today?
- ▶ What is your definition of wisdom?
- ▶ Do you possess wisdom? What evidence is there in your life that you possess wisdom?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that wisdom is found in the suffering and death of Christ?

- ▶ How does that relate to your own life?
- ▶ In what way, if any, are the Gnostic members of the Corinthian community a lesson for us today? What challenge do they present for us?

Gospel: Matthew 5: 17-37

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ The Hebrew Bible is separated three ways: the law, the prophets and the writings.
- ▶ The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch.
- ▶ It was originally believed that Moses was its author.
- ▶ In today's Gospel Jesus presents his catechism on the Law.
- ▶ He invited a serious renewal of the Law in heart, mind and spirit. He wanted the Law to be written on people's hearts.
- ▶ In other words, he challenged people to embrace the spirit of the Law in response to God's faithfulness and love for his people.
- ▶ CONCERNING ANGER:
- ▶ God's plan for the human race is that all people be in right relationship with God and one another. God intends for people to love one another—even their enemies.
- ▶ Murder is a serious breach against God's Law of love.
- ▶ Jesus goes beyond the obvious breach of murder to the lesser offense of anger and insists that even rage and anger can be brought under God's dominion by the power and grace of God working within the person.
- ▶ Disciples are to be agents of reconciliation and forgiveness: discord, hatred, grievance, dissension and rivalry need to be addressed and healed.
- ▶ One must reconcile before one comes before God for worship.
- ▶ The proscription that one must leave one's gifts at the altar and reconcile with one's brother or sister before worshipping God is an obvious exhortation to the listener with very practical implications.
- ▶ Within the religious and cultural context of first century Palestine a person's gift could easily be a goat, a pigeon or a cereal offering. It would be absurd to think of leaving one's goat at the altar unattended. The bottom line is clear—"Do not let the situation get so out of hand that it would necessitate leaving your goat offering at the door".

- ▶ Jesus' concern was incarnational. His concern was not for the Law; it was for right relationship.
- ▶ **CONCERNING LUST:**
- ▶ Jesus insisted that one could certainly not covet another person's most prized possession—his wife—if the initial sin of lust in the heart had not taken place first.
- ▶ Bottom line? Avoid the very thought of lusting.
- ▶ Lusting after another woman was the same as adultery.
- ▶ The kingdom Jesus preached was one in which men and women controlled their unbridled instincts and urges.
- ▶ **CONCERNING DIVORCE:**
- ▶ Divorce was not prohibited according to the Law, but it was regulated.
- ▶ The men of Jesus day believed they had the right to divorce their wives whenever they felt the whim to do so. Jesus said, "Not so." Such an action was a serious sin as far as Jesus was concerned.
- ▶ A divorced woman was either forced to remarry or forced into prostitution in order to survive.
- ▶ Once the woman remarried she was branded an adulteress.
- ▶ The Law may allow divorce but Jesus maintained that to do so was immoral.
- ▶ Divorce, therefore, according to Jesus could at the same time be legally valid but morally invalid.
- ▶ Jesus was more concerned with God's purpose for marriage. The unbreakable bond of marriage is God's will and intention since the creation of the world.
- ▶ Thus disciples must do everything in their power to heal fractured relationships keeping in mind that sometimes irrevocable relationships that destroy the human spirit can hardly be God's intention for anyone.
- ▶ **CONCERNING OATHS:**
- ▶ Merchants would call upon God to testify to the value of the goods they were selling.
- ▶ They swore on their beard, their clothing, their possessions, and their very life. They swore by Jerusalem. Such swearing implied God's ratification of their dependability.
- ▶ An oath was considered a profession of faith in God.
- ▶ Jesus was simply exhorting his disciples to be honest with one another and with God.
- ▶ Disciples' word is their bond. They should say what they mean and mean what they say.
- ▶ Jesus insisted that oaths were not necessary in the kingdom he was building.
- ▶ Today's gospel champions right living, right relationship and right interior outlook.
- ▶ Jesus insisted that disciples consider what lay behind the Law in the first place—the Law's intention—right relationship with God and one another.

- ▶ Jesus simply asks for a faith-filled response of love from his disciples.
- ▶ That response is only possible by the grace of God.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. *What spoke to you the most in today's Gospel?*

- ▶ Is there anything that was surprising to you in this teaching by Jesus?
- ▶ What does today's Gospel teach us about Jesus' relationship with us?
- ▶ What is the challenge of this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the present day implications on the section about anger?
- ▶ What are the present day implications about the section on lust?
- ▶ What are the present day implications about the section on divorce?
- ▶ What are the present day implications about the section on oaths?
- ▶ What are the implications in this Gospel when it comes to relationships?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR
 Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

Appendix

Today's Gospel challenges me to be a better disciple. It is very easy to think that my judgments and anger toward others are all very justified. Jesus calls us to go beyond our own self-righteous view of the world and make the healing of relationships a top priority.

There is one person in my history with whom I need to reconcile. I bear no hatred, but I obviously have unresolved issues with this person because every time his name comes up in a conversation I more than eager to share my tidbits of angst toward this person in a most unloving manner. That tells me that there is work to be done to mend and heal this relationship.

I easily pass it off as “no big deal.” However, it is a big deal if I am unwilling to be charitable to a person out of my past even in conversation. Jesus holds us to a different standard. I must ask: “Do I really want to be that committed to covenant discipleship with Christ?” If the answer is yes then I must let go of past animosities that still lurk beneath the surface of my heart. It is only possible with the grace of God.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Revelation I or II
Marriage
Morality
Moral Decision Making
Cross and Paschal Mystery

Life Issues
Prayer
Liturgical Year
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

REVELATION I or II

Every Sunday is an appropriate time to focus our attention on God's manifestation to the world through Sacred Scripture. Jesus' primary thesis is to preach the kingdom. Matthew's primary thesis is to preach Jesus—the revelation of God. Today Jesus reveals God's intention in the Law that was given to the people. He reveals God's intention. Divine revelation is given to us to reveal God's intention for the human race. God speaks to us through his Word and reminds of us the God/human relationship since the beginning of time. Today's liturgy is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about REVELATION.

MARRIAGE

Jesus teaches his followers about God's intention for marriage and the issue of divorce. Jesus was upholding the dignity of the wife in the marriage covenant. The men of Jesus' day believed they possessed the right to divorce their wives at will. Jesus challenged that notion and insisted that the husband would be thus guilty of serious sin if he were to do so. The woman could not survive without a husband and would thus be forced to remarry which would have rendered her an adulteress. Jesus challenged this unjust situation. He upheld the dignity of the marriage bond. Today would thus be an important occasion to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the sacrament of MARRIAGE.

MORALITY

Sirach's exhortation is the most explicit teaching on free will in the Old Testament. We have been given the power to choose to live the moral life or not to live it. In today's Gospel Jesus invites his followers to go deeper into the heart of the law—not just a literal rendering--but the relationship that underpins it. Disciples follow the law not in order to

save themselves—but in order to demonstrate the love and gratitude to God for the completely gratuitous relationship he forged with the human race. If we are to live the moral life we must understand the commitment we are making. It is thus important that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about morality.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Sirach's exhortation is the most explicit teaching on free will in the Old Testament. We have been given the power to choose to live the moral life or not to live it. In today's Gospel Jesus invites his followers to go deeper into the heart of the law—not just a literal rendering—but the relationship that underpins it. Disciples follow the law not in order to save themselves—but in order to demonstrate the love and gratitude to God for the completely gratuitous relationship he forged with the human race. If we are to live the moral life we must understand the commitment we are making. How then do we know what is moral? How do we know how to make moral decisions? Today's doctrinal session will focus on MORAL DECISION MAKING.

CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

Paul preaches the true meaning of wisdom—Jesus Christ crucified. It was a stumbling block for Jews but life for Christians. To die on the cross was the most unclean, horrific, shameful death a person could endure. The Jewish people simply could not believe God would will such a death. Yet for believers, this sign of execution became the sign of eternal life. Today's liturgy and every liturgy is an opportunity to focus our attention on the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

LIFE ISSUES

Sirach's exhortation is the most explicit teaching on free will in the Old Testament. We have been given the power to choose to live or to die. When we live according to the covenant we are choosing life, not death. It is Moses said to the people, "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then that you and your descendents may live, by loving the Lord your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you. (Dt. 30:19-20). If we are to choose life and not death, then we are called to be champions of that life—we are to safeguard that life in all its forms. We are to honor the covenant God made with us to be good stewards and care for the life entrusted to us. God created us with human dignity, mirrored in his own image. If we uphold every person's equality and dignity in the eyes of God we must hold and uphold that all life is sacred—from womb to tomb. Thus today is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about LIFE. Today's doctrinal session will focus on LIFE ISSUES.

PRAYER

The heart of Jesus' message today is interior disposition. Jesus expects more than mere adherence to the law from his disciples. The only way disciples will be able to make that leap is through a life of prayer and intimate relationship with God in Christ. Today's liturgy therefore is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches us about PRAYER.

LITURGICAL YEAR

In these early days of the liturgical year and Jesus' public ministry, it is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. It is thus most appropriate as the early days of the new liturgical year begin that we address what the Church teaches about the LITURGICAL YEAR.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.